Case Study: Abattoir Worker - Michael

What do you do?

I am a hazard co-ordinator for an abattoir. I set up systems for hazard analysis to ensure that no bacteria gets into any of the meat we supply to customers, so that the meat we supply is safe to eat.

I also do things like swabbing of carcasses to test for bacteria and test the water, again for bacteria. These tests have to be sent off to be checked.

I also carry out training for the workforce so that they are sticking to health and safety regulations.

What is your background?

I started work as an electrical engineer. I did a six-year apprenticeship then moved through various roles up until 2002, when I started here at the abattoir.

What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

You need a level head and you need to be able to deal with all the different types of people. You need to gain the respect of the people who work in the abattoir so that they will follow the health and safety rules. For example, I wouldn't go down there (into the abattoir) without a hat on and then ask someone to wear a hat.

You need good practical skills in some areas of the work I do. If you're working with the carcasses, you need to be reasonably fit, I imagine.

What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

Using the skills I've got, I could do maintenance work of an electrical or mechanical nature. The men in the abattoir need to be fit so any job involving practical work might be an option. Experience handling carcasses would obviously be useful for them.

What changes will there be in the future?

There will be changes. These could be in the way we operate. For example, currently we remove the spinal cord and people are questioning whether we really need to do that. The issues with 'mad-cow' disease seem to have lessened and having to perform that procedure is a cost for the company. At this stage, it's too soon to say what'll happen.

What are the biggest challenges in your job?

Keeping up with all the new legislation is the main one. I'd say for the men downstairs (in the abattoir), the main challenges are things like getting the work done in the time allocated for it, and also, as it is for me, being aware of all health and safety rules, of which there are, of course, many in this industry.

Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

The turnover here can be quite high, but we do have people who've been here for years. Some people take to it, and some people don't. I would say though that if you wanted to work in an abattoir, there'll always be opportunities for you.

What do you like about your job?

The challenge. It's all about the challenge and keeping on top of things. And I only work four hours a day!

What do you dislike about your job?

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Getting up at six in the morning! It's not really a problem though because even in my last job I had to get up early.

**What are your ambitions?**

Well, I'm 60 next year, so I haven't got any ambitions as regards moving on. I just want to carry on doing a good job and make sure the company doesn't break any health and safety rules.

**What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?**

I think it's a good idea to get some grounding in the health and safety regulations related to this industry. Also, you need to think about whether you can cope with what happens in an abattoir. As I said, some people take to it, and some don't.

**A day in the life**

I start at 7. First thing I do is check my to-do list. So on the list for today are:

- Carcass swabbing. I swab from the back to the front of five random carcasses, the results are then sent off for analysis.
- Check that surface area forms have been done.
- Do the bacterial test for the water.
- Place a chlorine tablet in the tank, as I have to do every morning.
- Talk to the lairage guide to find out what animals we've got coming in this morning.

Every day, I have to go around the abattoir monitoring to make sure that everyone is working alright. I also have to check that the machinery is working ok.

Basically, a lot of my working day is spent responding to things that happen.

At 10.15, I go around the abattoir again and check that everyone is doing what they're supposed to. I finish at 11.